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S E C R E T RANGOON 000714

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SUBJECT: BURMA: ALLEGED USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS ALONG THAI
BORDER (C-AL5-00590)

REF: STATE 101852

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

1. (S/NF) Per reftel request, we are providing this Embassy Rangoon interagency response to questions regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons by Burmese army forces in a battle near the Thai border in February 2005. Answers are keyed to numbered reftel questions. CG Chiang Mai has cleared on this cable. Embassy Bangkok has cleared on this cable, but will send its own responses septel.

(4. A. 1) The April 23, 2005 edition of the GOB mouthpiece "New Light of Myanmar" newspaper published the Minister of Information's response to a question posed at a press conference regarding allegations of a chemical attack during military action near the Thai border. The quotation in the newspaper read: "...Myanmar has already signed the chemical weapon control convention. The nation and the government have never violated their commitment. And the nation is not in a position to produce chemical weapons. Thus, the accusations concerning the use of chemical weapons and the existence of victims showing signs of chemical weapon attack on the skin are wrong."

(4. A. 4) It is misleading to say, as some press accounts have, that there is or has been a UN "investigation" into the alleged use of chemical weapons. When the allegations first surfaced, the UN Resident Coordinator in Burma wrote a letter to the Health Minister, and has subsequently raised the issue with the Health Minister and the Deputy Foreign Minister. He has also been in contact with the Australian doctor who examined the five KNPP alleged chemical attack victims. Though he never received an official reply, the Resident Coordinator was told by very senior GOB officials that: Burma doesn't have the capability to produce or transport chemical weapons; Burma is a signatory to the chemical weapons treaty and would not violate it; and, the GOB would not use such weapons even if they had them against a group with whom they might hope to soon negotiate a cease-fire. The Resident Coordinator concluded, in a June 3rd written statement to us: "It would seem from all the information collected that there is no irrefutable evidence that such weapons were used."

(4. C. 1) We are aware of various reports of sporadic skirmishes in early-mid-2005 between Burmese Army and ethnic forces near the Thai border. Rangoon DAO believes the KNLP does not possess artillery, but may have light mortars, though it is highly unlikely they are capable of firing chemical projectiles.

(4. C. 2) We have no indications that Burma has reconstituted a CW program. According to Rangoon DAO, Burma Army soldiers do not carry even basic CW protective gear that could be evidence of potential use of chemical weapons.
Martinez